

# Improving Communication

Mark Beard, LPC, NCC

When emotions run high between two people it can be difficult to have a productive and healthy conversation. Often those involved are more concerned with disputing what the other person is saying, or defending oneself, instead of listening and trying to understand the other's perspective. To achieve understanding, and hopefully a productive outcome to the conversation, try using the following pattern for your conversation. (Note: this is my version of a familiar approach)

First, if possible, sit down, calm down, face one another, and speak normally. This will allow you to better focus and be more aware of subtle visual cues from the other person's expressions, allowing you to make slight adjustments to your conversation. The person being spoken to should remain quiet and listen to the speaker with the intent of completely understanding. Offer some positive affirmation as you begin such as, "I love you and want us to get past something that is bothering me."

Second, organize your thoughts in this manner: I see. I feel. I need. Can you help me?

Example:

- "When I see or hear..." Cite a specific problem or action or comment. This is not the time to make accusations or criticize. Simply state clearly the example of behavior or comments with which you have a problem.
- "I feel..." At this point explain your emotional reaction to the words or actions you do not like. Remember, the problem is the words or behavior, not the person to whom you are speaking. It is important to make it known what you experience emotionally and how it the emotions you feel pose a problem for you.
- "I need..." This is when you explain your emotional needs and why/how a different response or approach from the other person could help you.
- "Can you help me by..." Finally, it's time to explain to the other person exactly what you are hoping they will do. Be specific as to what you want them to do or how you hope they will speak to you in the future. Otherwise, the other person is left to attempt to get it right on his or her own. The fact you are having this conversation is an indicator the other person probably does not know the better thing to do or say.

As you conclude, thank them for listening and allow them to respond. Ideally, the other person has remained quiet and listened. Now, they can respond to what was said and requested. If the request can be granted, do it. If not, negotiate by responding, "I can do this... but not that." Make a positive counter offer. Negotiate. Problem-solve. But stay positive and cooperative.

If conversation has brought another issue to the mind of the hearer, it is his or her turn to begin the same process to present his or her need and request. (I see. I feel. I need. Can you help me?)